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### I'm so glad I came, but I can't wait to leave

**Citation for published version:**

Rodriguez-Dorans, E 2019, 'I'm so glad I came, but I can't wait to leave: An autoethnography of identity, gayness, and migration through theatre and performance', *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research*, vol. 7, no. 4, pp. 123-138. <https://doi.org/10.1525/dcqr.2018.7.4.123>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.1525/dcqr.2018.7.4.123](https://doi.org/10.1525/dcqr.2018.7.4.123)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

**Published In:**

Departures in Critical Qualitative Research

**Publisher Rights Statement:**

Accepted for publication by Departures in Critical Qualitative Research on 11/25/2018.  
<http://dcqr.ucpress.edu/content/7/4/123>

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## I'm So Glad I Came, but I Can't Wait to Leave

*An Autoethnography of Identity, Gayness, and Migration through Theatre and Performance*

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**ABSTRACT** Can a theatre play provide actors and audiences with a feeling of being at home? This article is an autoethnographic work that addresses how the author finds, in his work directing the research-based theatre play *Heavier than Air* devised by Anne Harris and Stacy Holman Jones, a self-identification with its queer characters. Describing it as a play that explicitly and implicitly welcomes people to be queer and to tell their stories, the author analyzes how the play also symbolizes the free movement of people and the quest for home. **KEYWORDS** Performance; Autoethnography; Theatre; Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer

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The day I was told I am an immigrant, I felt as if I had been told: "You don't belong here. Go." He probably was just making a reference to the fact that I moved from Mexico to Scotland. I don't think that my friend was making a negative remark about me being an immigrant. But I was. That day I started reflecting on my understanding of the word "immigrant." That day I realized I had started another existential self-inquiry.

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Having grown up and lived in Mexico for 32 years, I always felt that I belonged there. There are, of course, aspects of Mexican culture that I do not like or embrace and there were occasions when I did not feel completely welcome in certain spaces. There were occasions when I could not wait to leave. However, my right to be and remain there was never questioned. Not by myself, not by anyone else. After all, I was born there and, although I traveled extensively, I always came back to Mexico. That was home. At the time of writing this text, I have lived in Scotland for five years. After having finished a PhD here, having gotten a post at the university, and having met and married the man I love, I can say that I have established my life here. Scotland is gradually becoming home.

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However, it is not yet “home-home”—in the sense that I still feel as if I am in transit, as if this is not my final destination. What is one’s final destination anyway? Are we not always in transit? Is life not a journey? Like Netzahualcoyotl, an Aztec emperor wrote, “[we are] not forever on earth, only a brief time here!”<sup>1</sup> Even though I rationally observe that I am growing roots in Scotland, I feel this is not “home-home.” When I visit my family and friends in Mexico, I experience the sense of familiarity that used to make me feel I belonged there, but the familiarity and the history does not seem to be enough to feel that that is “home-home” either. But if not here in Scotland and not there in Mexico, where is home?

This is a very present question for me, one I discover myself thinking about often while traveling within Edinburgh; while hearing people on the bus talking in different languages on their phones, when seeing tourists on the Royal Mile taking photographs; when speaking to students and listening to their stories of their journeys to university. In my reflections on home, I remember my dissertation on gay men’s identities, in which I explored aspects of the romantic and erotic relationships that gay men engage in.<sup>2</sup> In some cases, the men I interviewed engaged in relationships as if they were on a quest for home. “Home” seemed to be a concept far more subjective than the reference to the place where one lives. “Home” was an example of an essential word we use frequently, but when explored further, we see it is not as easily explainable as we might have thought. Could an entire country, one of its cities, or a town be called “home”? Could “home” be a mobile place? Could it be the case that “home” is not necessarily about the place but about the emotions we experience in a place? Where is a migrant’s home? Is home the place where we live but don’t belong or the place where we were born and raised but have left long ago? Could a relationship be home? Could a person be home?

The realization that home has become a difficult concept to grasp has made me reflect on how I am experiencing a similar process to the one when I was starting to make sense of my desires and my identity as a gay man. I went all the way throughout elementary school and high school without being able to speak to any of my classmates or friends about my desires. It was only when I started to actively seek partners that I realized that the heteronormative idea of relationships I had grown up with was not where I belonged. I separated the encounters I had with men and relegated them to a private, often furtive, area of my life. Even though I gradually gained a sense of confidence to speak out and became an advocate for gay rights by writing articles for a porn magazine

of national reach in Mexico, I somehow kept the separation between my “gay life” and the rest of my life. I am not saying that I was deliberately trying to hide my gayness; what I am saying is that I did not seem to find a way to integrate what I believed were two separate identities—Edgar the man and Edgar the gay man. In practice, this separation of identities meant that throughout my teenage years and my early twenties, I would not speak about my relationships, questions, dreams, and concerns with my family or friends. And even when writing for this porn magazine, which was made by gay men for men who desired other men, I felt that my writing about human rights would be more effective if I used reports, statistics, documents, and other people’s stories to illustrate or justify my arguments. I used to feel that my own stories did not have a space there.

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I have been involved in theatre-making since I was nineteen. I formed a theatre company with my then-boyfriend and we produced annual performances for thirteen years. We would present different plays of social and political content; theatre became an outlet to express things that we could not have said otherwise. In 2006, we decided to stage *Angel Quiere Salir* (*Angel Wants to Come Out*), a play based on the story of a gay couple; a coming of age story of two young men who have to fight against prejudices that were sometimes shared by themselves. Over the whole history of our theatre company, this was the play that I felt most satisfied with; I saw myself and my relationship reflected on stage, I felt that the characters were depicting my own life. I felt that I was doing something important not only for me, but also for other people like me, who could be going through similar struggles and could be living similar lives. Staging that theatre play felt right. However, in an aim to produce plays that were relatable to a “wider audience,” my boyfriend and I did not produce again other plays centered on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ) themes. We felt that one “gay play” was enough for now, that we should wait some time before producing another “gay story.” We silenced ourselves perhaps as an internalization of the pervasive homophobic argument that says gay people try to impose “the gay agenda.”<sup>3</sup>

In 2013, when I moved to Scotland to pursue my PhD, the work of the theatre company was paused. As part of my learning process, I was introduced to autoethnography. One of the first pieces I read was Tony E. Adams’s *Narrating the Closet*,<sup>4</sup> which showed me how powerful telling one’s own story can be. It was a very steep learning curve for me, as my background in psychology privileged the type of research that evokes the natural sciences model underpinned

by values such as the pursuit of objectivity, neutrality, and generalizability. My engagement with qualitative methodologies helped me to see the power of personal stories in research in the same way that I saw their value in theatre plays. This new-to-me way of conducting research in combination with my experience doing theatre empowered me to start telling stories that resonated with me. For the first time, I wrote a play based on an episode of my life and I saw the potential of a personal story to create a rippling effect amongst other people who could be experiencing similar life circumstances. *Purple*, the first autoethnographically inspired play I wrote in 2013, was the beginning of my engagement with my own LGBTQ stories and the need to tell them more, to more people, to portray them on stage. Since then, I have only staged performances that address issues that LGBTQ people face on a daily basis. Evoking a sense of familiarity and happiness I associate with my idea of “home,” doing this kind of theatre has helped me feel at home.

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Being introduced to Anne Harris and Stacy Holman Jones and being offered the opportunity to collaborate in the staging of *Heavier than Air*<sup>5</sup> in Edinburgh helped me to confirm the importance of telling the stories of LGBTQ and gender nonconforming people. As you—the reader—will soon realize, there are other people like me, people who seem excited about seeing themselves represented in the stories portrayed on stage.

#### RECRUITMENT OF PERFORMERS

“Casting for *Heavier than Air* a theatre play about queer teachers” the advertisement read on the castings website. It had been published for a couple of days only and when I reviewed the responses, dozens and dozens of actors had sent their applications showing their interest in participating in the Edinburgh production.

*Hi, I saw your ad and I am really interested. LGBTQ is close to my heart as I am pansexual myself. I live in London and would have to travel every week. I am despite that very interested and would love to learn more about the play. Please let me know if you find me suitable for any parts.*

Some of the actors auditioned from different parts of the United Kingdom and Europe via video footage, some others traveled from different parts of Scotland, some others were locals. With one of the biggest performing arts festivals in the world, Edinburgh was the perfect setting for this production. However, there was something more that was attractive to them. Besides the names,

professions, and the fact that they were LGBTQ people, nothing else was said about the characters in the casting call. Except that their stories were based on the real-life experiences of queer teachers in Australia.

*Heavier than Air* became a collection of stories that traveled freely across the world. The play was the means of transport that allowed these voices to move without borders. As if they had been carried about by the whistling wind—with no passport and no visa—the voices of ten teachers traveled from Australia to Scotland and were ready to be embodied. “What would happen if border controls were suppressed and people were granted the right to move freely throughout the world?” Antoine Pécoud and Paul Guchteneire ask in regards to the scenario of “migration without borders,” a notion that deals with the “ethical, human rights, economic, and social implications of the free movement of people” and is often seen as unrealistic.<sup>6</sup>

As in an act of resonance, in which a casting call let them hear the soothing sound of acceptance, many of the applicants mentioned in their responses to the advertisement that they wanted to participate in the project because they were part of the LGBTQ community. Read, for example, the message sent by this actor who explicitly wanted their story to be heard:

*For this role, I have real life experience. I am transgender, and lived as a woman for years, and had gone through gender reassignment surgery. I reverted to living as male again in 2009. Having gone through the experience of changing my gender role twice; from male to female, then back to male again, I can comfortably portray either a male or female role. My height enables me to pass easily as a woman, and I can comfortably adopt a female speaking voice. I can portray a very natural representation of a transwoman, and hope you will consider me for the role.*

I see a clear parallel between the efforts societies make to control migrants and control LGBTQ people. On the one hand, states develop extensive infrastructure to manage migration. Pécoud and Guchteneire write that states around the world are developing strict and expensive measurements to police and control flows of undocumented people in response to strong concerns about the “porosity of their borders.”<sup>7</sup> Bimal Gosh writes that “governments, inadequately equipped to constructively manage these flows, are showing an increasing resistance to inflows of migrants, alongside a seemingly declining tolerance of foreigners in many receiving societies.”<sup>8</sup> Similarly, according to Aengus Carroll and Lucas Ramón Mendos, there are 72 countries where same-sex sexual relations are severely outlawed and the gender identity recognition by the State and

the human rights of trans people across the world are relatively new, even to the United Nations' mechanisms and agencies.<sup>9</sup> And "the practice in many countries of not being able to have one's self-identified gender recognized by the State, even with gender reassignment surgery, leads to violence and discrimination."<sup>10</sup> Living where same-sex relationships are criminalized must be hard for LGBTQ people. It must be quite hard for them to feel at home in their own countries. It must be hard to call those "their" countries when they are not welcome.

In this light, it becomes relevant to readdress the question what, where, who is home? Sara Ahmed et al. write that considerations of home/belonging and migration must challenge the "presumption that movement involves freedom from grounds, or that grounded homes are not sites of change, relocation or uprooting. Being grounded is not necessarily about being fixed; being mobile is not necessarily about being detached."<sup>11</sup> In the same way that I do not feel completely at home in Scotland even though I have put down roots and am fully settled here, the sense of belonging that seemed to emerge when the casting call for *Heavier than Air* was published suggests to me that "home" can be a space that exists in spite of its immateriality. The theatre play does not exist outside the text. The narratives of the research participants who shared their stories with Harris and Holman Jones were transformed into a theatre play, inviting the narratives to be repeated in different contexts, highlighting the need for LGBTQ stories to be told. In the staging process, I looked—alongside the actors—for different ways to embody the narratives so that they transcended the narratives and created community. Could a theatre play be "home"?

Barriers to free movement of people can be, for example, their nationality, their education level, their income. Barriers to live LGBTQ lives can be, for example, anti-homosexuality laws, prejudice, discrimination, violence. Finding home when being an immigrant and being a member of the LGBTQ population invites me to think of the concept of free movement of people. *Heavier than Air* managed to symbolically transgress the barriers to both free movement of people and the barriers to live LGBTQ lives.

The message quoted earlier—sent by an actor wanting to audition for the role of Fiona—is telling. This message, in its succinctness, describes a story of a person who has been shaped by gender as much as they have shaped gender. They could be the embodiment of what can be considered gender fluidity, or the ability to move between gender identities. And I believe that this story could only be told in the context of a queer play, a play that explicitly and implicitly welcomed people to be queer and to tell their stories. This actor's account of



their real-life experience of being transgender echoes the notion of migration without borders, moving genderlessly. This actor transcended the porous borders of gender. To me, the importance of *Heavier than Air* lies in the invitation to think about gender and identity in the everydayness of a work environment, in a school environment. A common homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic argument relies on the belief that by talking about our LGBTQ identities, we are talking about our intimate, sexual lives. David Lowbridge-Ellis discusses how one of the biggest barriers towards inclusive education and acceptance of LGBTQ people is the misconception that it is all about sex.<sup>12</sup> However, *Heavier than Air* proves that talking about our LGBTQ identities is talking about life itself. Talking about LGBTQ identities involves talking about the mundaneness of our dress codes, our hairstyles, our voices, our bodies—it is impossible to talk about life without talking about these aspects.

There was generosity in the actors letting their life stories inform their work. There was liberation. When I read the responses of these people, proudly sharing their stories, I felt a sense of listening to people who were finding, in that casting call, a space where they could speak about things that perhaps they could not speak anywhere else. In their generous responses, I saw that they had found a play in which they could not only work, but also *be*.

## AUDITIONS

Choosing the cast for the Edinburgh production was an exercise in getting to know the person. With the narratives of the teachers at the core of the selection process, the auditions were a hybrid of unstructured interviews and auditions. Actors would enter the room and be introduced to the panel (the costume designer, me—the director of the play, and the assistant director). Then the actors would talk freely about their motivations to join the project. An organic conversation would follow; I didn't ask set questions because I knew that each conversation would develop differently and only in that way would I get the best from each actor. Next, we would talk about the characters. For example, "Really, Really Short Hair" is the "true" story of Kaz, a teacher—who happens to be a lesbian—developing her career in Australia, whilst being questioned by her students and even herself about her ambiguous? fluid? nonbinary? nonconformist? gender appearance. Her exploration of gender norms through the deceptively simple act of growing her hair longer or having a really short haircut takes place in the context of wider heteronormative oppression. Her internal struggles with social defiance are juxtaposed with the questions of her students, culminating in acts of different levels of harassment.



Discussing the scenes with the actors during the auditions helped us get a better understanding of the real people behind the roles. Some actors commented that the arduous journeys portrayed in the play were like those experienced by themselves as part of the LGBTQ community. As these early exchanges revealed, there was a sense of expertise in the room as they were experts in their own lives being LGBTQ people.

#### THE TABLE READING

The first table reading gave life to the text, and the characters embodied by the actors made me wonder how the participants in Harris and Holman Jones's research would feel about their stories having travelled across the world to be represented by these people. "Our school is acclaimed as a great school" the school principal, Mr. Hall says in Scene One "not only by reputation, but because of YOU, our outstanding teachers. We choose our teachers carefully. Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the new school year."<sup>13</sup> Listening for the first time to how Mr. Hall, Kaz, Ben, Fiona, and all the other queer teachers interact with each other was an act of resonance, from Scene One to the Epilogue. Mr. Hall's use of the seemingly innocuous phrase "ladies and gentlemen" invites us to rethink its appropriateness, especially in the context of a play portraying a diverse group of individuals who challenge traditional understandings of gender and identity.

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At the end of the first table read, I asked the actors, "What is most stimulating about bringing this script to life?" Some identified with many of the characters' experiences; they had been bullied, they had been attacked, they had gone through transition, they had found themselves hiding their identity, they had found themselves isolated, they had felt outsiders in a heteronormative society, they had had to develop "a very thick skin."

Even though the play was based on the experiences of teachers in Australia, even though the cultural contexts were different, even though the identities of the research participants were unknown to us, even though 15,182 km separate Scotland from Australia, and even though some members of the cast seemed slightly worried about performing with an Aussie accent, there was a sense of "truth" impregnating the room. Although it was their first encounter with the full script and the other members of the cast, the truth didn't come from how familiar they were with the text, the Australian accent, or how to portray a convincing teacher; the sense of truth came from their experiences of being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer.

After the last line of the last scene had been read, I asked the actors, “What’s the biggest challenge about taking on this role?” One by one, actors shared their experiences. One of the lines in the script reads, “It doesn’t help as a teacher, if you don’t share things with the class”<sup>14</sup> The phrase can be interchanged for “It doesn’t help as a gay young man, if you don’t share things with your mates in the rowing club”; “It doesn’t help as a lesbian, if you don’t share things with your colleagues at work”; “It doesn’t help as a trans man if you don’t share things with your friends.” “But it doesn’t help either, that when you do share your stories, people are quick to judge,” a member of the cast mentioned. It requires courage and persistence and energy and determination to face the implications of being openly gay, proudly lesbian, boldly bisexual, or visibly trans. Take for instance, the experience of one of the actors who auditioned for the play and generously agreed to share her narrative:

*Hi there, I would like to be considered for the role of Pam. As a Pansexual myself and very much an OUT woman from a young age, I can Identify with the difficulties one faces in an educational situation and how one would keep things separate, although that’s not something I did. I have also encountered a lifetime of confusion from others over the fact that they can’t put me in a box. “Greedy” is a word that has been uttered to me and although I would never, never, deny my sexuality, I can relate to the swerving certain situations and people. My training and background has been in Theatre in Education and, although for the last ten years or more I have been working in film, I would really like to get involved with such an important project. Best of luck, look forward to hearing from you.*

The narrative of this OUT woman, wanting to audition for the role of Pam, a teacher who identifies as pansexual, describes a victory of the self that never, never, denied who she was. However, alongside the victories this woman described, she also described the seemingly “universal” struggles. Why do I call them universal? Because this actress who shared her story via email was sharing something that is commonplace for queer people. We are familiar with having words being uttered to us, we are familiar with the feeling of being misunderstood. We are familiar with having to hide parts of our lives, we are familiar with the feeling of having to assess every single daily life situation. Ernest, a character in the play, explains: “Because when the kids get to know you better, they like you better and. . . They respond better. It makes you a better teacher. . . So, when you withhold things, you don’t get to have a good relationship with them.”<sup>15</sup> And with naive simplicity, many seemingly

progressive straight people may ask what the big fuss is, everyone is free to speak about themselves and reveal who they are. But when

You need to reveal something that. . . I wouldn't call it a weakness but, it's something that might make you vulnerable. . . in a sense. . . I would say so. . . Right? It's just that you need to reveal an intimate part of yourself. Which is not socially, it's not necessarily socially accepted.<sup>16</sup>

Most actors in the cast were more than familiar with that sense of vulnerability, with that sense of being cautious about revealing certain aspects of their lives. And the ones who were OUT, like the woman responding to the casting call, were those who had had enough of hiding.

The character Fiona has a line that caused everyone to nod their heads in full understanding: "I'd gotten so used to dodging questions."<sup>17</sup> We've gotten so used to pretending to be oblivious to acts of aggression, to acts of homophobia, transphobia, and all sorts of "phobias"—why do they call them homophobia and transphobia? The Oxford dictionary describes a phobia as "an extreme or irrational fear of or aversion to something."<sup>18</sup> Are they afraid of us—LGBTQ people? "It is often us who have been afraid!" one of the actors said during one of the rehearsals. Some of us are used to letting those things slip; we've developed "a very thick skin," Ernest says in Scene One. The character Kaz explains that sometimes the easiest task is to avoid the questions: "I just ignored it. Tried to redirect. Tried to move on."<sup>19</sup>

In *This Machine Builds Nations*, Jasmina Cibic researches how cultural production is used as "soft power" to construct, communicate, and reinforce certain political principles.<sup>20</sup> I see how this production of *Heavier than Air* is a form of soft power to resist the hegemonic norms that exclude LGBTQ people. I see how *Heavier than Air* became a safe environment in which every single person revealed intimate aspects of their life. Amongst all those queer actors, the straight ones were a minority, and suddenly, for a little while, they experienced what being "the Other" feels like.

## PERFORMANCE

Seeing this play from my seat amongst the audience made me realize that this text, these voices, this arts-based research is a pledge to address the inequality of representation on the contemporary stage. Harris and Holman Jones have gone a step further by creating a play with equal parts for male and female actors, cis-gender and transgender actors, and nonconforming actors. Directing this play allowed me to see how many different nationalities, cultures, and identities

could come together and form a diverse cast. The Australian context was adapted to the Scottish context to make it more relatable to the local audience and, most importantly, the actors allowed their lives to inform the stage work in a way that the professional became personal and the personal—as it often happens—intertwined with the professional. Although they depicted how teachers in educational settings in Scotland would experience acceptance, inclusion, or oppression in their educational settings, the actors' work from rehearsal number one reflected that, whilst LGBTQ identities across the world might be experienced differently, there is a common element of oppression.

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At the end of the show, I asked one of the straight actors, "What was your experience as a straight actor working in a truly diverse team?" He replied that it was common for him to work in different theatre groups for years while remaining unaware and uninformed how living in a heteronormative culture really impacts LGBTQ people. He had studied and worked in different settings while viewing everything from his own heterosexual lens and—assuming himself a relatively progressive straight man—believing that all controversies and misunderstandings were somewhat disproportionate, believing that we were already at a point when "we're all equal," that "we're all at the same stage now." He used to believe that speaking exclusively about the experiences of LGBTQ people could lead us to stereotyping and putting individuals in boxes with generalized identities. He explained that instead of talking about LGBTQ people, it was important to judge people as individuals, not just as products of their collective "LGBTQ" identities. However, he also described the transformational qualities of working with this group, concluding that underestimating the impact that being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer has on people's lives risks viewing "the Other" with a heterosexual lens and thinking of them under those parameters.

This play—the rehearsals and the performance—provided an example to illustrate the difficulties faced by LGBTQ teachers in their school environments. These difficulties were sometimes overt, crude, and prosaic, but sometimes so sophisticated that they could almost go unnoticed. For example, Chris is a character who went through a harrowing experience for which he had to take a year off work due to a mental breakdown, caused by students and a series of vicious acts of violence. It was a scene that was difficult for me to direct, difficult for the actor to perform, and difficult for the rest of the cast to partake in.

I would find it very hard to not be stressed if I saw "Teenage boys on motorbikes, driving recklessly outside my home calling me 'Fucking faggot,' destroying

property, breaking trees, breaking fences, and keep calling me ‘You fucking faggot.’”<sup>21</sup> As the director, I wanted to show through this scene that violence is still blatant, even in countries where one might believe that “we’re all equal.” So, when the actors representing the bullies asked me, “Shall we tone it down?” I replied: “No, keep it as it is.”

But let’s explore the sophisticated acts of violence, those that often go unnoticed, via Kaz’s experience of constant self-awareness, of constantly being “on guard.”

### REALLY, REALLY SHORT HAIR<sup>22</sup>

“Do you have a boyfriend, Miss?” A deceptively innocent question is used in the scene to illustrate how diversity is not part of people’s mindsets, it is not in people’s comfort zone to think that *any* woman could be interested in other women, it is not in people’s comfort zone to think that *any* man could be a gay man. It is still considered a rarity. Thus, people would hardly ask, “Are you gay?” And it might not be in a gay person’s comfort zone to be asked that. But why? It’s not something to be offended by. Some people might argue that it is an intimate question. But is it? Talking about being gay, or being lesbian, or being trans is not necessarily a question of intimacy. If I say I’m gay, I’m not necessarily talking about my intimate life, I might be referring to the cultural aspects implied by the term. To talk about being gay, lesbian, or trans, is to talk about life itself. In Kaz’s scene, we are witness to a series of questions that could be, in many circumstances, innocuous. However, they are intentional questions that Kaz does not answer, she “just ignored [them]. Tried to redirect. Tried to move on. And [the student] just kept asking.”

In the performance of *Heavier than Air* in Edinburgh, actors smiled organically when they found themselves in situations wherein the text invoked a response from them. Actors were affected by the text and they affected the text. Nervous smiles, compassionate smiles, confused smiles. Smiling out of amusement, smiling out of incredulity. When Kaz is asked repeatedly, constantly, whether she has a boyfriend, her responses vary from trying to put up with the comments and trying to ignore the comments to a direct confrontation with the student by saying those questions have to stop because they constitute sexual harassment. Amongst the myriad responses the actor played during this scene, the choice of a smile captures my attention because of the questions it raises. What does the smile contain? What does it express? How does it relate to the experience of being sexually harassed?

Devika Chawla suggests that “telling the stories of smiles and the affects that produce them is akin to understanding the body as a historical subject and

object, simultaneously shaped by and implicated in creating history.”<sup>23</sup> In this sense, the actor playing Kaz was affected by the text and she chose to smile. This resonated with me and evoked memories of my experience as a teaching fellow, when some students would try to provoke a negative response from me by highlighting aspects of my behavior that jarred with their ideas of what being a man is. I would hear students asking me questions during class while mimicking my voice. I would hear them speaking behind my back in what sounded like a stereotypical gay pitch,<sup>24</sup> the way they perceived my voice. I remember using my best acting skills to show myself unaffected—stoic to their acts of mockery, smiling with subtle disdain, and continuing my class as usual. My smile was a weapon, a strategy that worked well to show them I was not going to walk into their traps. However, with this response, I was engaging in a dynamic that suggested mockery was neither acknowledged nor punished. Chawla writes:

And as I gather these moments and dwell upon them, I can only conclude that gendered affects colonize equally, yet distinctly, across bodies and borders. The accrual takes different forms. We smile, or don’t, to survive. Here, survival rests upon an ability to be pleasant to and with the world. There, or at least in the “there” of my family, survival is about a moderate rationing of this affective pressure to acknowledge (or never forget) the histories of displacement, of oppression.<sup>25</sup>

A smile with disdain was my way of showing them they were not touching me, they never would. My smile would show them I would not be the object of their oppression. My smile was my strategy for survival. And I did survive—I taught at that university for two years and for the most part I enjoyed my time there. However, it was a tough time, it was a character-building experience that made me develop a thick skin. I was happy that I taught there and that I cultivated some good relationships with students and colleagues. However, there was a part of me that wanted to escape that homophobic environment. As St. Vincent sings, “Am I thinking what everybody’s thinking? I’m so glad I came, but I can’t wait to leave.”<sup>26</sup>

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My friend says: “So you’re writing a paper on immigration? From what angle are you going to approach it? Oh, wait, you’re an immigrant, does that help you to write your article?” I smile and respond: “Yes, I am. . . . I suppose I am an immigrant, right?” And suddenly I wonder what meanings my friend attaches to the fact that I am an immigrant. I wonder but I do not ask. I smile.

I start thinking of home. I start thinking of my mother and my friends who live in Mexico. I start thinking of my husband and my friends in Scotland.

I start thinking of the future and wondering where I will be in 30 years. I do not know where/what/who is home. This might be a question for which I will never again have as clear-cut an answer as I used to. However, something important to remark is that my relationship with my husband feels like home, I feel at home when I look at him directly in the eye. As I write this line, I see him on the couch watching a movie and—as in one of those cinematographic moments in which the director asks the actors to look at each other to signify connectedness—my husband looks at me and smiles. I smile back, and I feel his love. I feel this is how home must feel.

Although this scene is not part of *Heavier than Air*, I could easily be a character in it, because the play succeeds at accurately portraying the daily experiences of LGBTQ people at work. This scene might as well be one of many queer stories that will continue exploring and portraying the feelings of powerlessness, empowerment, acceptance, inclusion, love, and hope that LGBTQ people experience when we are just trying to do our jobs. The teachers who spoke up for this research, the audiences who watched the play, and you—the reader of this text—are continually reminded that there are many voices that have not been heard. And that is why *Heavier than Air* will continue giving voice to those who have spoken and will continue encouraging those who have not yet dared to speak. They're striving, resisting. And they're doing it, perhaps through the deceptively simple—and yet incredibly symbolic—act of having really, really, short hair.



FIGURE 1. Poster for the Edinburgh production in 2017. Design by Nichole Fernandez. ■



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